

International Mechanisms for Promoting Freedom of Expression

JOINT DECLARATION

Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the New Century

by

the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OAS Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression

Having met with representatives of NGOs, UNESCO, journalists associations and human rights experts in London on 19-20 November 2001, under the auspices of *ARTICLE 19, Global Campaign for Free Expression*, assisted by *Canadian Journalists for Free Expression*, we;

Recall and reaffirm our Joint Declarations of 26 November 1999 and 30 November 2000;

Condemn the criminal terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and extend our deepest feelings of sympathy to the victims;

Are of the view that the events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath highlight the importance of open public debate based on the free exchange of ideas, and should serve as a catalyst for States all over the world to bolster guarantees of freedom of expression;

Express our concern about the consequences these events are having for the right to freedom of expression at the advent of the “electronic century” which is witnessing the growing dominance of forms of communication such as broadcasting and the Internet;

Are aware of the fact that broadcasting remains the most important source of information for most people in the world;

Recognise the growing importance of the Internet, and its potential as a tool to enhance the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information;

Note the importance of regional mechanisms in promoting the right to freedom of expression and the need to promote such mechanisms in every region of the world, including in Africa and Asia;

Recall the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban and our Joint Statement on Racism and the Media of 27 February 2001, which stated: “Promoting an optimal role for the media in the fight against racism, discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance requires a comprehensive approach which includes an appropriate civil, criminal and administrative law framework, and which promotes tolerance, including through education, self-regulation and other positive measures”;

Adopt the following Declaration:

Countering Terror

- Terror must not triumph over human rights in general, and freedom of expression in particular;
- Certain governments have, in the aftermath of the events of 11 September, adopted measures or taken steps to limit freedom of expression and curtail the free flow of information; this reaction plays into the hands of the terrorists;
- Guarantees for freedom of expression have developed over centuries but they can easily be rolled back; we are particularly concerned that recent moves by some governments to introduce legislation limiting freedom of expression set a bad precedent;

- We are of the view that an effective strategy to address terror must include reaffirming and strengthening democratic values, based on the right to freedom of expression;
- The events of 11 September have brought in their wake a rise in racism and attacks against Islam; we call on governments, as well as the media, to do all within their power to combat this dangerous trend;

Broadcasting

- Promoting diversity should be a primary goal of broadcast regulation; diversity implies gender equity within broadcasting, as well as equal opportunity for all sections of society to access the airwaves;
- Broadcast regulators and governing bodies should be so constituted as to protect them against political and commercial interference;
- Effective measures should be adopted to prevent undue concentration of media ownership;
- Media owners and media professionals should be encouraged to conclude agreements to guarantee editorial independence; commercial considerations should not unduly influence media content;
- We are of the view that elected political officials and members of government who are media owners must separate their political activities from their media interests;

The Internet

- The right to freedom of expression applies to the Internet, just as it does to other communication media;
- The international community, as well as national governments, should actively promote universal access to the Internet, including through supporting the establishment of information communication technology (ICT) centres;
- States should not adopt separate rules limiting Internet content;

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